A Huge Storm, and Newsletter Changes; Climate Fwd:

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Highlight: We have a few thoughts about Hurricane Florence and climate change. And a new, more consistent format for our newsletter.

Body

Welcome to the Climate Fwd: newsletter. The New York Times climate team emails readers once a week with stories and insights about climate change. Sign up here to get it in your inbox.

Tracking Hurricane Florence

Hey there, friends of the newsletter! We hope you can deal with change, because we're making a few changes around here. But before we get to that, we've got a big, bad storm to talk about.

Hurricane Florence is heading toward the Carolinas with the potential for devastating winds and storm surge at the coast and catastrophic rainfall over much of the region. The National Hurricane Center calls it a "life-threatening" storm.

The hurricane center noted that, while the forecast track of the storm had shifted somewhat to the south by Wednesday morning, "The threat to life from storm surge and rainfall will not diminish, and these impacts will cover a large area regardless of exactly where the center of Florence moves."

So what does this have to do with climate change? Plenty. A warming planet doesn't cause individual hurricanes, of course; they've been with us forever. But the effects of climate change have been linked to higher storm surges and rainier storms, and research suggests that powerful storms will grow even stronger in coming years as ocean waters grow warmer. There is even evidence that climate change causes hurricanes to linger longer, which Florence is expected to do.

Last year, according to one study, Hurricane Harvey got a 38 percent boost in its rainfall capacity from climate change.

For now, it's most important if you're in the path of this storm to get out of the way and to urge family and friends threatened by Florence to do the same. Mark Schleifstein, the science writer for NOLA.com and The Times-Picayune, laid out a warning in a stark tweet on Tuesday: "Live along areas of the N.C./S.C. coast ordered to evacuate and not going to do it? Keep an ax in your attic. And write your Social Security number on your arm, so officials can identify your body." Brrr.

Now, here's my colleague Lisa Friedman. From here on, she and I will be leading off the newsletter with the biggest climate stories of the week. We'll continue to have original reporting and links to other coverage. And each newsletter will also offer a tip: one thing you can do to reduce your personal carbon footprint. So stay tuned for that, below.

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... and the Best of the Rest

In addition to Hurricane Florence, we've been watching two big stories this week.

Climate leaders from around the world and thousands of activists, business executives and government officials are gathering in California for the Global Climate Action Summit. It's being billed as the largest-ever meeting of states, regions, cities and companies which, in the absence of action from the United States under the Trump administration, will try to show the world that Americans are still serious about addressing global warming.

My colleague Brad Plumer wrote a sharp piece on whether the meeting can actually move the needle on emissions goals set under the Paris Agreement.

At the other end of the country, in Washington, the Environmental Protection Agency is poised to weaken an Obama-era requirement that would have helped stop methane, a potent greenhouse gas, from leaking into the atmosphere.

Coral Davenport has the methane story here.

If you aren't already doing so, I encourage you to follow Brad and Coral on Twitter: @bradplumer and @CoralMDavenport.

One thing you can do: Shut the fridge door

Here at Climate: Fwd we get a lot of questions from readers asking what they can do personally to help combat climate change. In response, we're beginning a new feature that looks at steps individuals can take to reduce their carbon footprint.

We start in the kitchen, with the elephant in the room: the refrigerator.

Recommendations vary slightly among government agencies and consumer groups, but the proper temperature for a household refrigerator is 37 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit (3 to 4 degrees Celsius). There is less disagreement about proper freezer temperature: 0 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 18 Celsius).

What about increasing those temperatures somewhat, to save energy (and money)? While it might be tempting, it's not a good idea. Fresh food will spoil sooner, and frozen food will decline in quality more quickly. You certainly don't want to waste food, or worse, risk food poisoning.

Randy Worobo, a professor of food microbiology at Cornell University, said higher temperatures in the refrigerator accelerate the growth of pathogens that are already in the food. Of particular concern, he said, is the bacterium that causes listeriosis, a potentially fatal infection.

"It can be at very low levels, but by increasing the temperature you can dramatically increase the growth rate," he said.

Adding to the problem, Dr. Worobo said, is that many people keep their refrigerators too warm to begin with. A 2015 study in Britain, for example, found that half of refrigerators in older adults' homes were above the recommended temperature.

Consumers may not be entirely to blame for this. Many refrigerators with simple thermostat dials are not easy to set precisely, and even new models with digital readouts can be off.

All of this suggests a safer way to potentially save money and contribute, however slightly, to saving the planet: Invest $5 or $10 in an appliance thermometer, which can accurately tell you how cold the fridge and freezer compartment really are; you can then adjust the settings as needed. I recently bought a pair of thermometers and they showed that both the refrigerator and freezer compartments of my year-old KitchenAid were several degrees colder than their digital settings.

But Dr. Worobo said the easiest way to reduce your kitchen-carbon footprint — at no cost — is to have your mind made up before you open the refrigerator.

“Don’t stand with the door open, making decisions about what you want to eat,” he said. “That is where their biggest energy consumption is.”

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